TALES OF YUDHISHTHIRA

Loyal brother, caring husband, humble victor and kind human being – Yudhishthira had earned the right to eternal happiness. But he wanted his loved ones around him, and for this he was willing to endure the tortures of hell. His life was a series of tests, trials and tribulations but he never failed to rise to the occasion.

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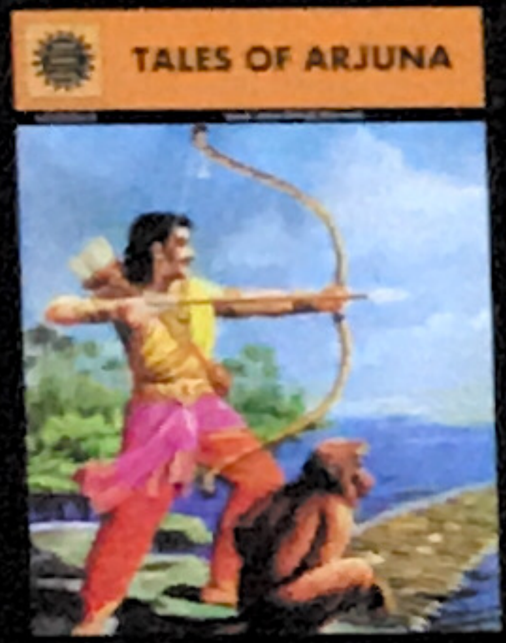

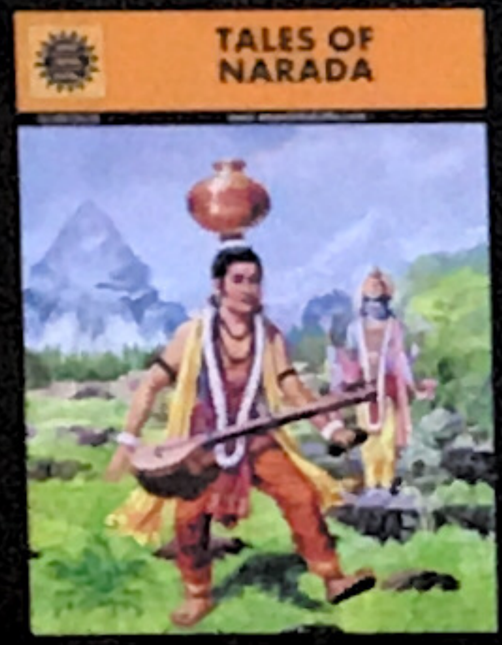

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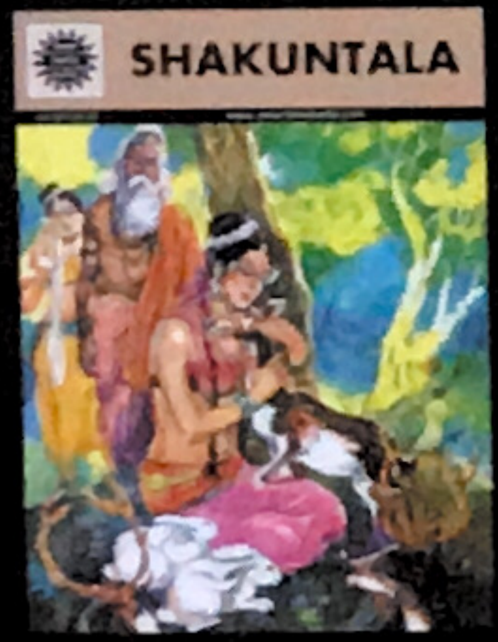

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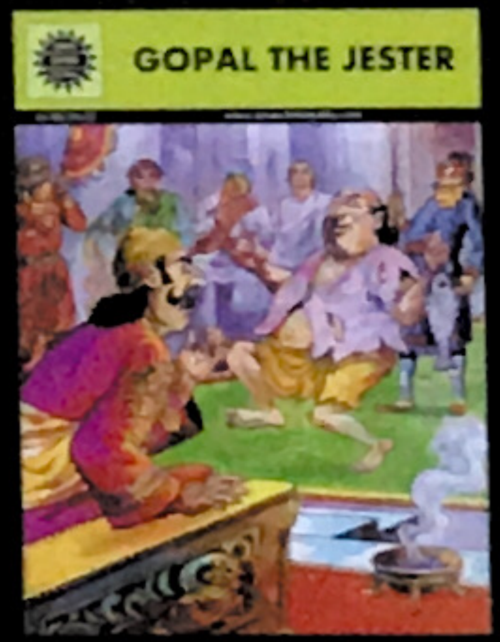

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JUSTICE FOR THE PANDAVA

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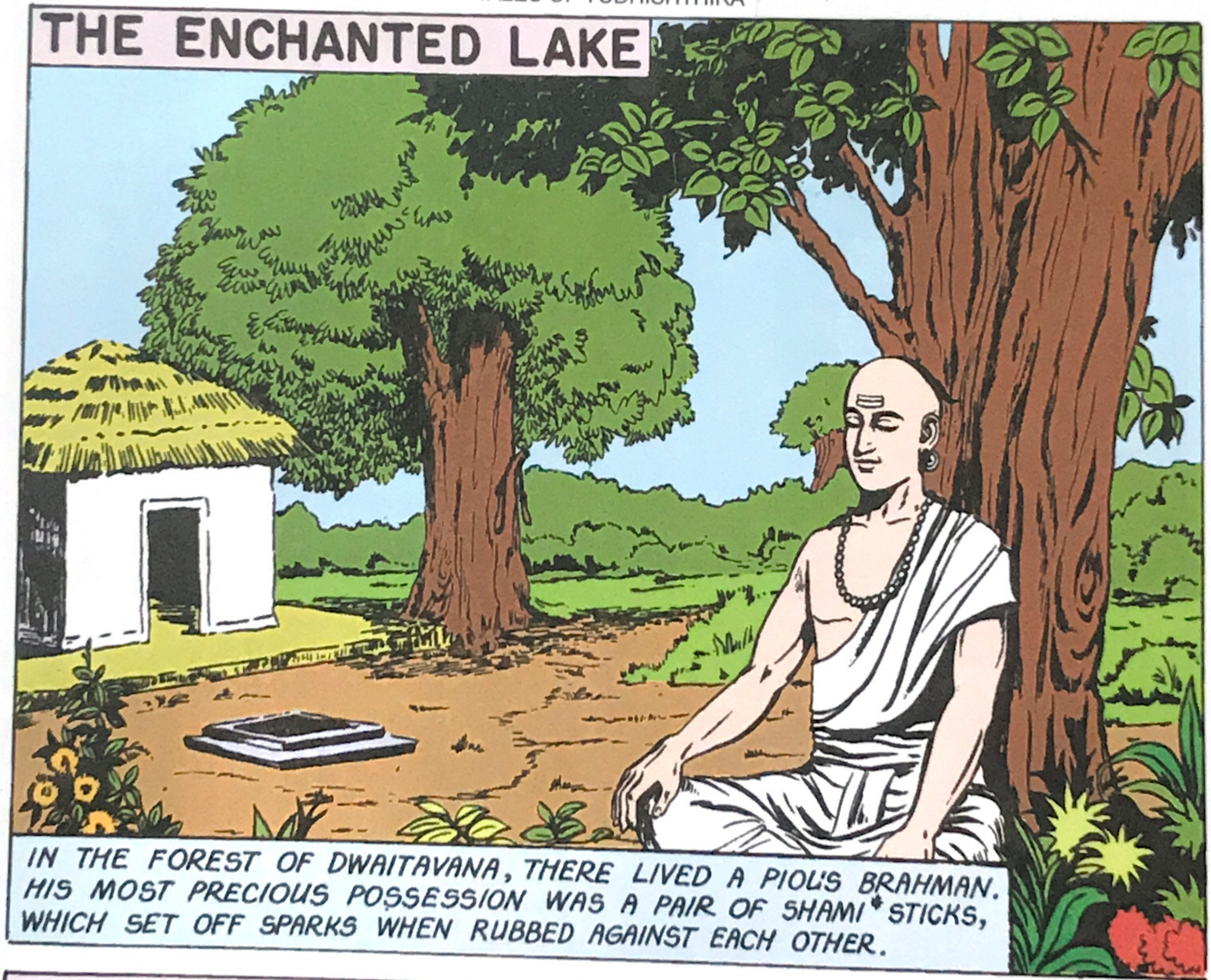
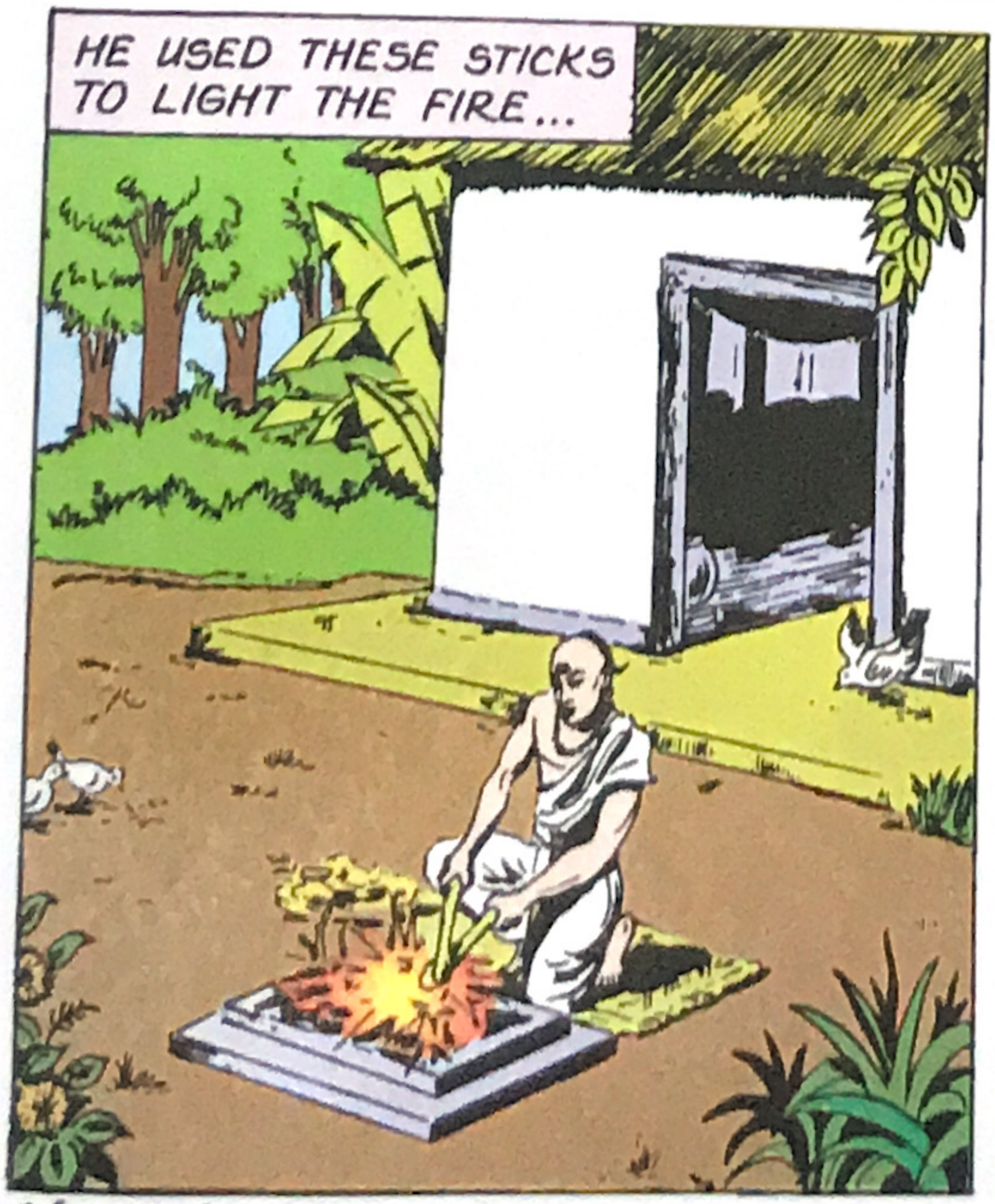
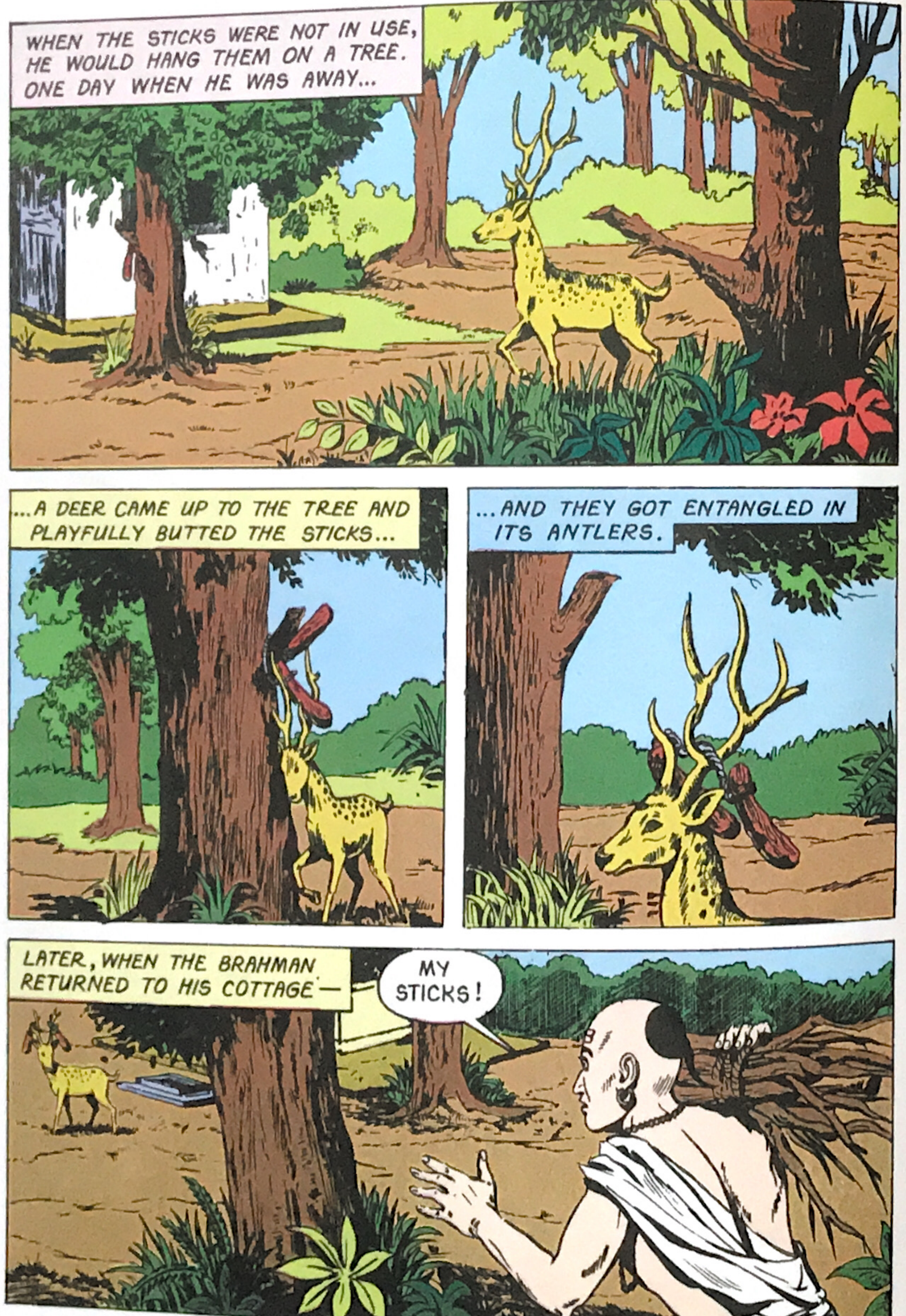
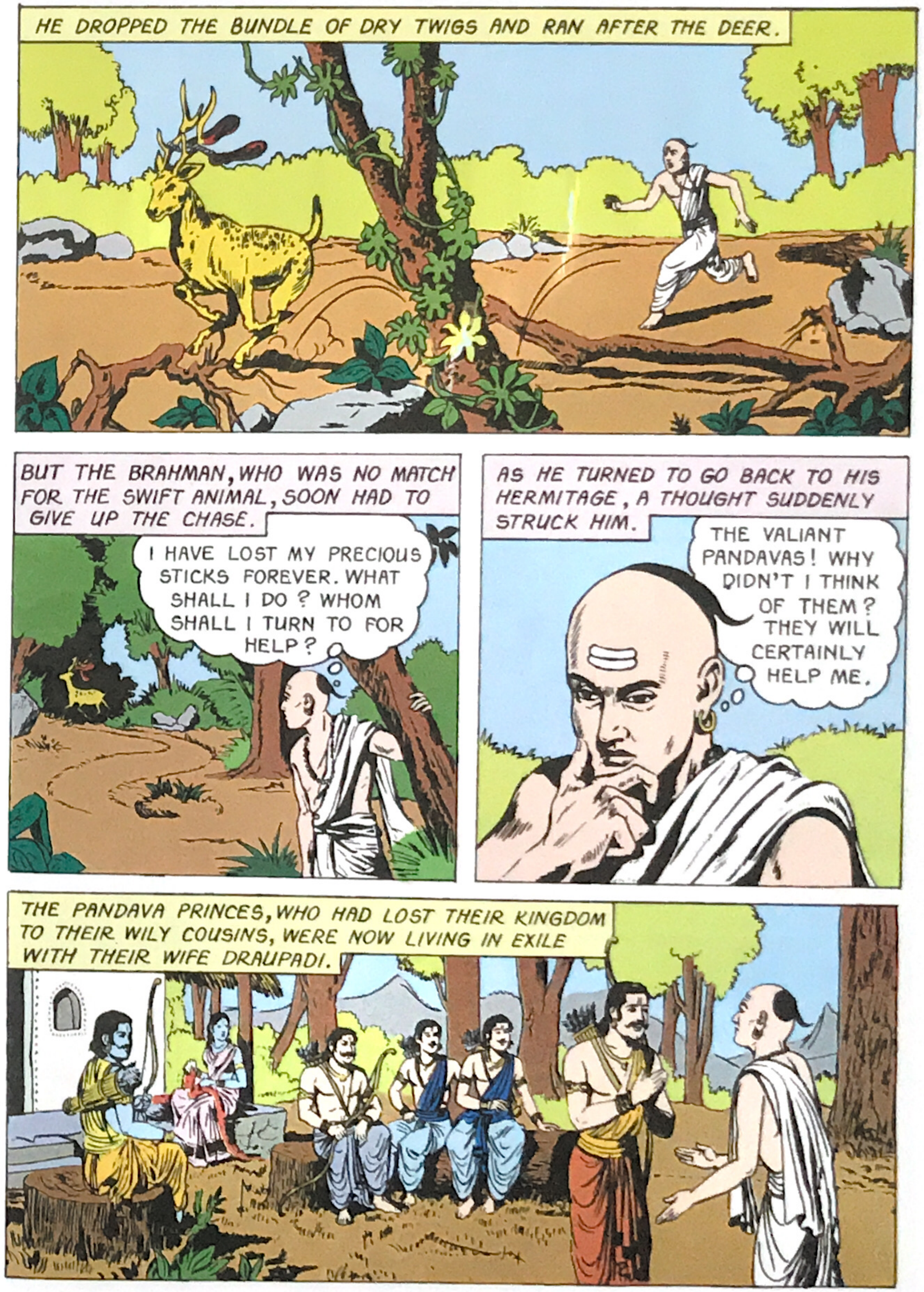
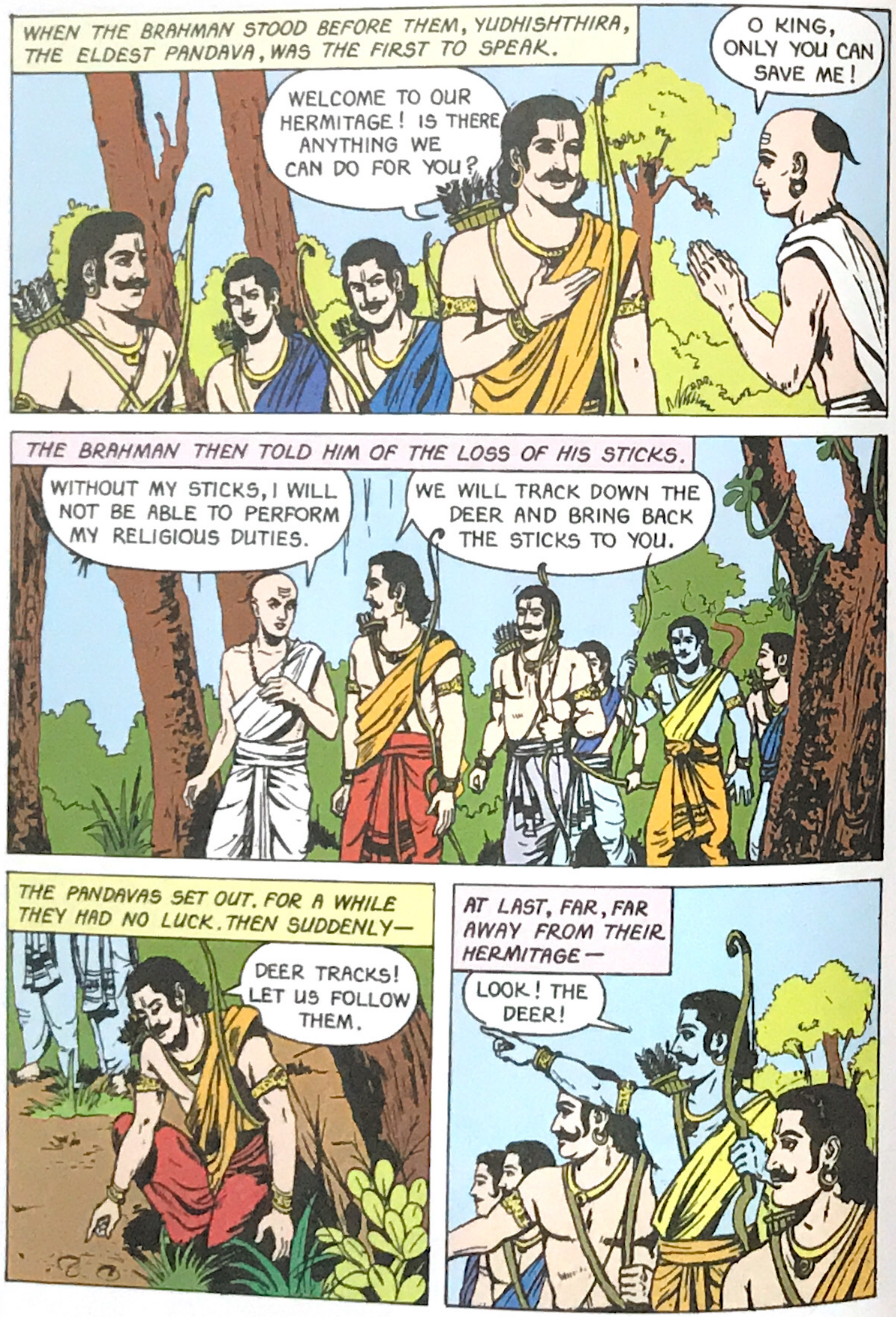


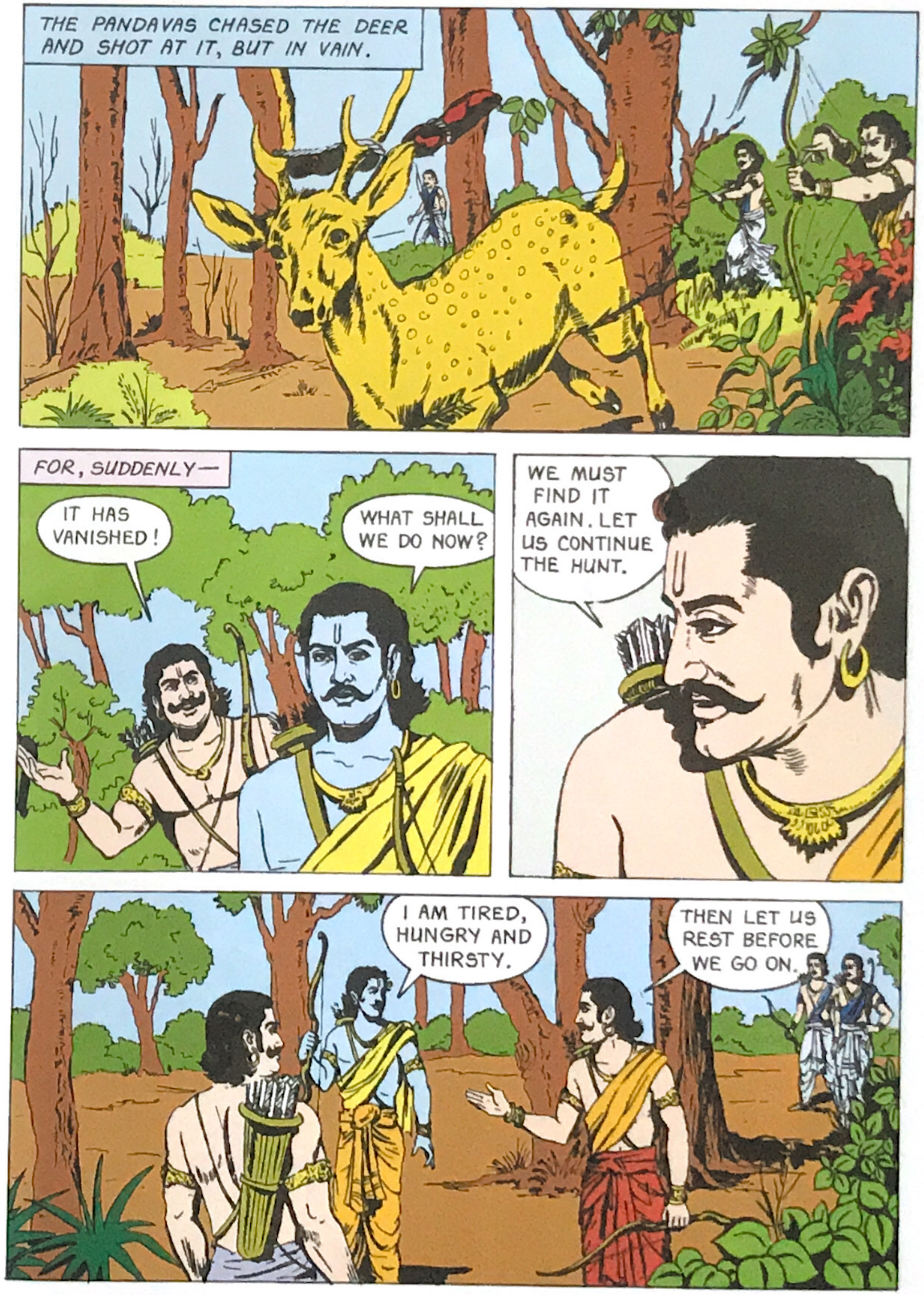


*'SHAMI' WOOD WAS USED FOR KINDLING THE YAGNA OR SACRIFICIAL FIRE

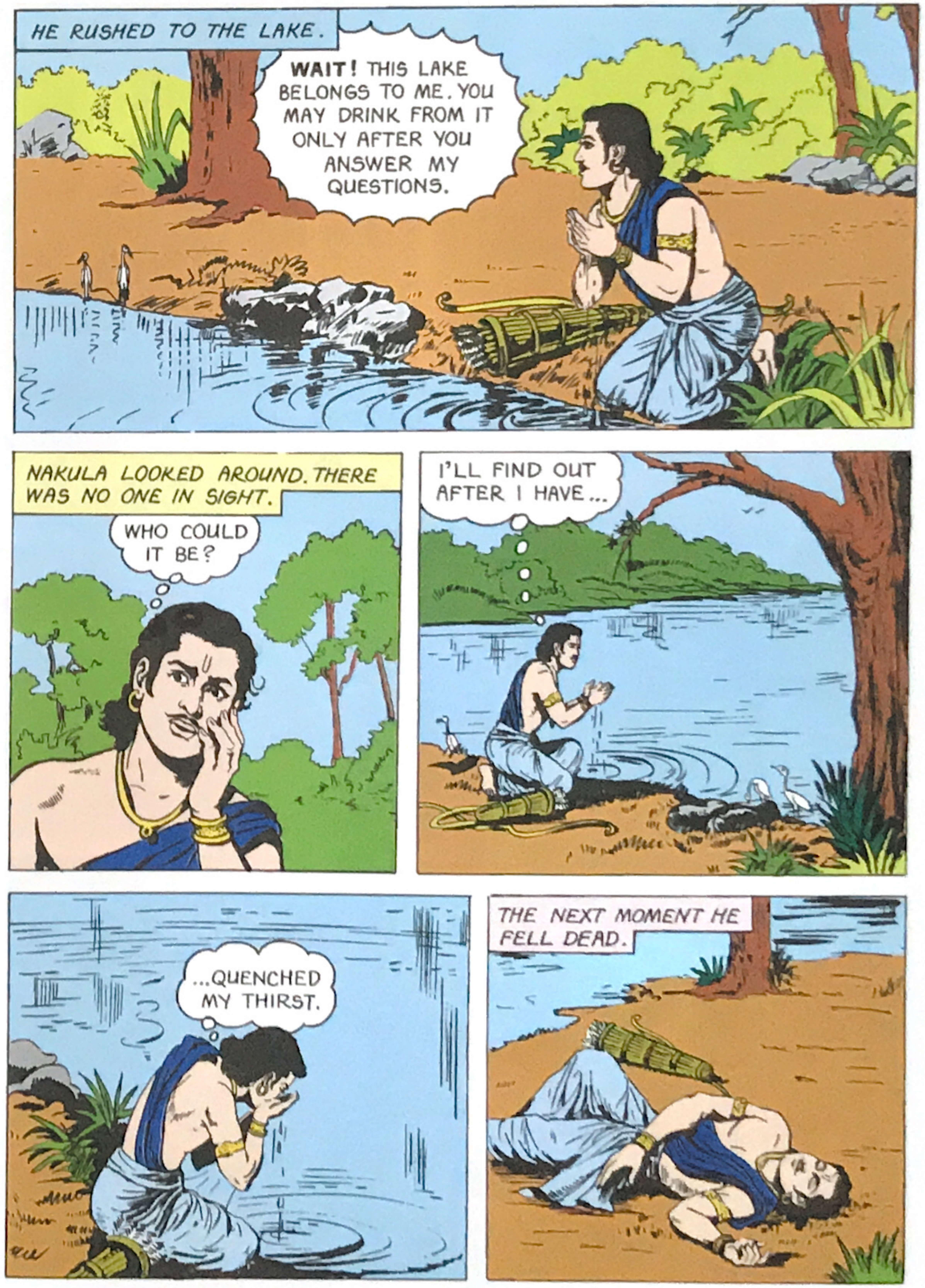

WHEN THE STICKS WERE NOT IN USE, HE WOULD HANG THEM ON A TREE. ONE DAY WHEN HE WAS AWAY...
...A DEER CAME UP TO THE TREE AND PLAYFULLY BUTTED THE STICKS...
...AND THEY GOT ENTANGLED IN ITS ANTLERS.
LATER, WHEN THE BRAHMAN RETURNED TO HIS COTTAGE—
MY STICKS!


HE DROPPED THE BUNDLE OF DRY TWIGS AND RAN AFTER THE DEER.
BUT THE BRAHMAN, WHO WAS NO MATCH FOR THE SWIFT ANIMAL, SOON HAD TO GIVE UP THE CHASE.
I HAVE LOST MY PRECIOUS STICKS FOREVER. WHAT SHALL I DO ? WHOM SHALL I TURN TO FOR HELP ?
AS HE TURNED TO GO BACK TO HIS HERMITAGE, A THOUGHT SUDDENLY STRUCK HIM.
THE VALIANT PANDAVAS! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THEM ? THEY WILL CERTAINLY HELP ME.
THE PANDAVA PRINCES, WHO HAD LOST THEIR KINGDOM TO THEIR WILY COUSINS, WERE NOW LIVING IN EXILE WITH THEIR WIFE DRAUPADI.


WHEN THE BRAHMAN STOOD BEFORE THEM, YUDHISHTHIRA, THE ELDEST PANDAVA, WAS THE FIRST TO SPEAK.
WELCOME TO OUR HERMITAGE! IS THERE ANYTHING WE CAN DO FOR YOU?
O KING, ONLY YOU CAN SAVE ME!
THE BRAHMAN THEN TOLD HIM OF THE LOSS OF HIS STICKS.
WITHOUT MY STICKS, I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO PERFORM MY RELIGIOUS DUTIES.
WE WILL TRACK DOWN THE DEER AND BRING BACK THE STICKS TO YOU.
THE PANDAVAS SET OUT. FOR A WHILE THEY HAD NO LUCK. THEN SUDDENLY—
DEER TRACKS! LET US FOLLOW THEM.
AT LAST, FAR, FAR AWAY FROM THEIR HERMITAGE—
LOOK! THE DEER!


THE PANDAVAS CHASED THE DEER AND SHOT AT IT, BUT IN VAIN.
FOR, SUDDENLY—
IT HAS VANISHED!
WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?
WE MUST FIND IT AGAIN. LET US CONTINUE THE HUNT.
I AM TIRED, HUNGRY AND THIRSTY.
THEN LET US REST BEFORE WE GO ON.

NAKULA, CLIMB UP THIS TREE AND SEE IF THERE IS A TANK OR A STREAM NEAR BY.
THERE IS A LAKE NOT FAR FROM HERE.
GOOD, COME DOWN AND FETCH US SOME WATER IN YOUR QUIVER.
SOON—
WE ARE INDEED FORTUNATE TO FIND WATER SO NEAR AT HAND.


HE RUSHED TO THE LAKE.
WAIT! THIS LAKE BELONGS TO ME. YOU MAY DRINK FROM IT ONLY AFTER YOU ANSWER MY QUESTIONS.
NAKULA LOOKED AROUND. THERE WAS NO ONE IN SIGHT.
WHO COULD IT BE?
I'LL FIND OUT AFTER I HAVE...
...QUENCHED MY THIRST.
THE NEXT MOMENT HE FELL DEAD.

MEANWHILE THE OTHER PANDAVAS BECAME IMPATIENT.
WHY HASN'T NAKULA RETURNED YET? GO, SAHADEVA, AND SEE IF YOU CAN DO BETTER.
WHEN SAHADEVA, THE YOUNGEST OF THE PANDAVAS, NEARED THE LAKE—
NAKULA! NAKULA! HE'S DEAD! HE MUST HAVE DIED OF THIRST. I'D BETTER DRINK SOME WATER BEFORE I SUFFER THE SAME FATE.
I OWN THIS LAKE. IF YOU DRINK WITHOUT FIRST ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS, YOU TOO WILL FALL DEAD.
BUT SAHADEVA HARDLY HEARD HIM.
AND HE TOO FELL DEAD.

THEN CAME ARJUNA, THE THIRD OF THE PANDAVAS. HE CAME IN SEARCH OF HIS BROTHERS.
NAKULA! SAHADEVA! HOW...WHO HAS DONE THIS VILE DEED? WHOEVER IT IS, HE HAS INVITED HIS OWN DEATH.
ARJUNA RAISED HIS BOW AND LOOKED AROUND.
THERE IS NO ONE IN SIGHT. BEFORE I GO IN SEARCH OF THE MURDERER, I'D BETTER QUENCH MY THIRST.
WHEN HE WAS ABOUT TO DRINK THE COOL WATER...
NO, ARJUNA, DON'T! NOT IF YOU WANT TO LIVE. YOU WILL FIRST ANSWER MY QUESTIONS.

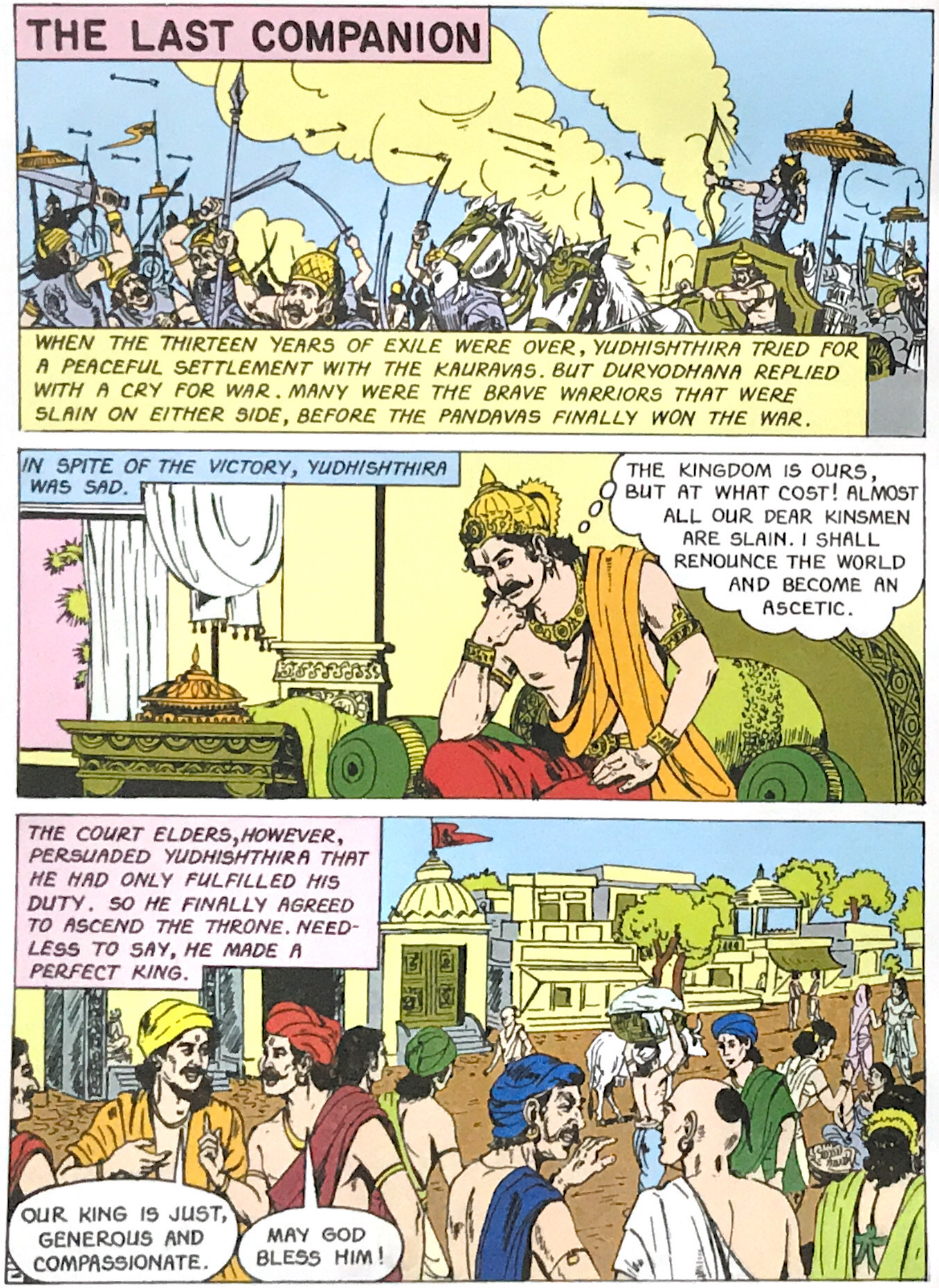
* DEMI-GOD ✦ DEMON

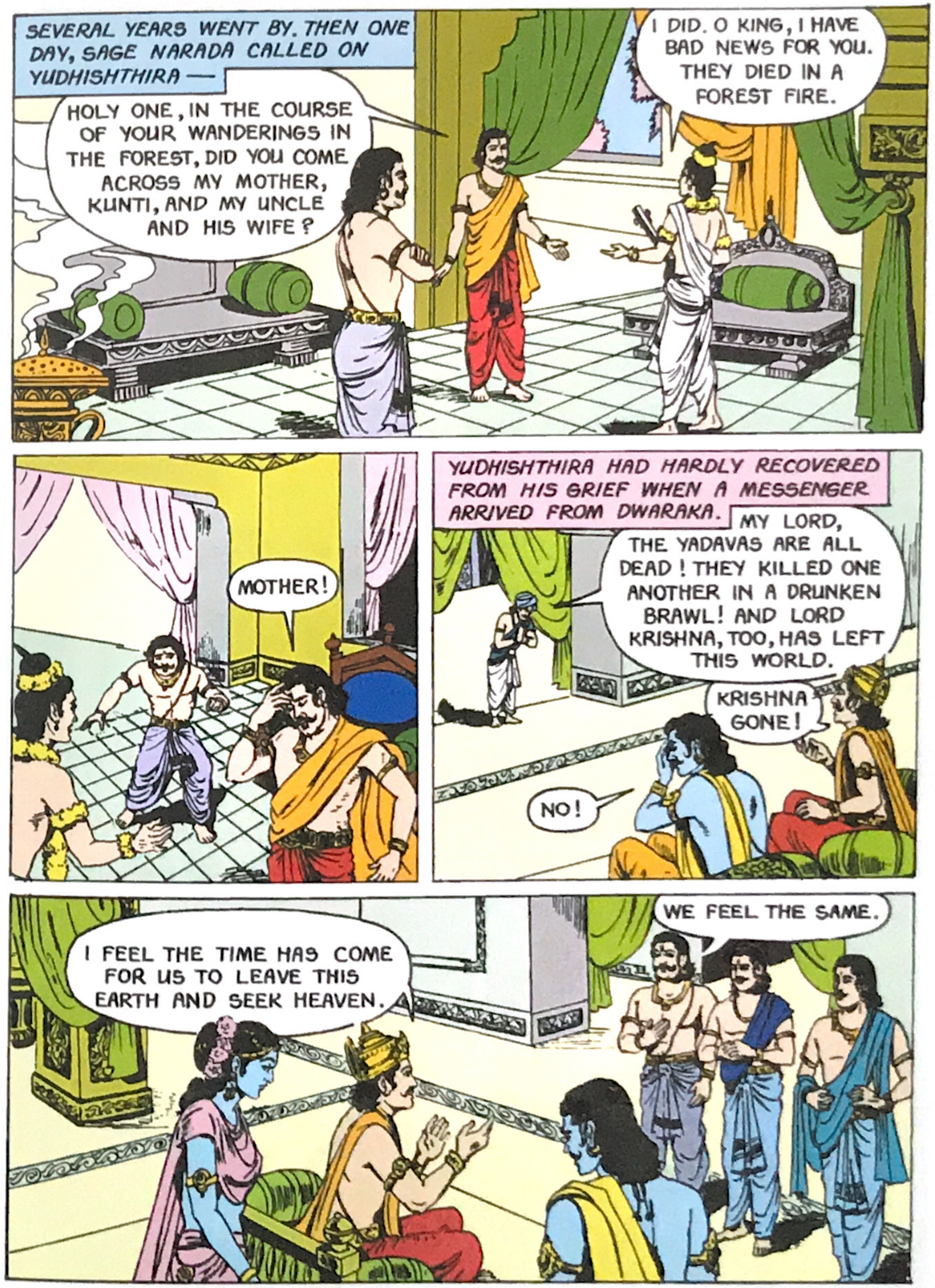
O INVINCIBLE ARJUNA, O MIGHTY BHIMA, THERE WAS NONE TO EQUAL YOU IN STRENGTH AND VALOUR! WHO COULD HAVE KILLED YOU?
O NAKULA! SAHADEVA! MY CHILDREN! SURELY MY HEART MUST BE MADE OF STONE THAT, BEHOLDING YOU DEAD, IT DOES NOT BREAK
NO MARK OF WEAPONS UPON THEM! NO SIGN OF A STRUGGLE! NO FOOTPRINTS VISIBLE! WHO COULD HAVE KILLED THEM?
AS YUDHISHTHIRA WAS ABOUT TO DRINK...

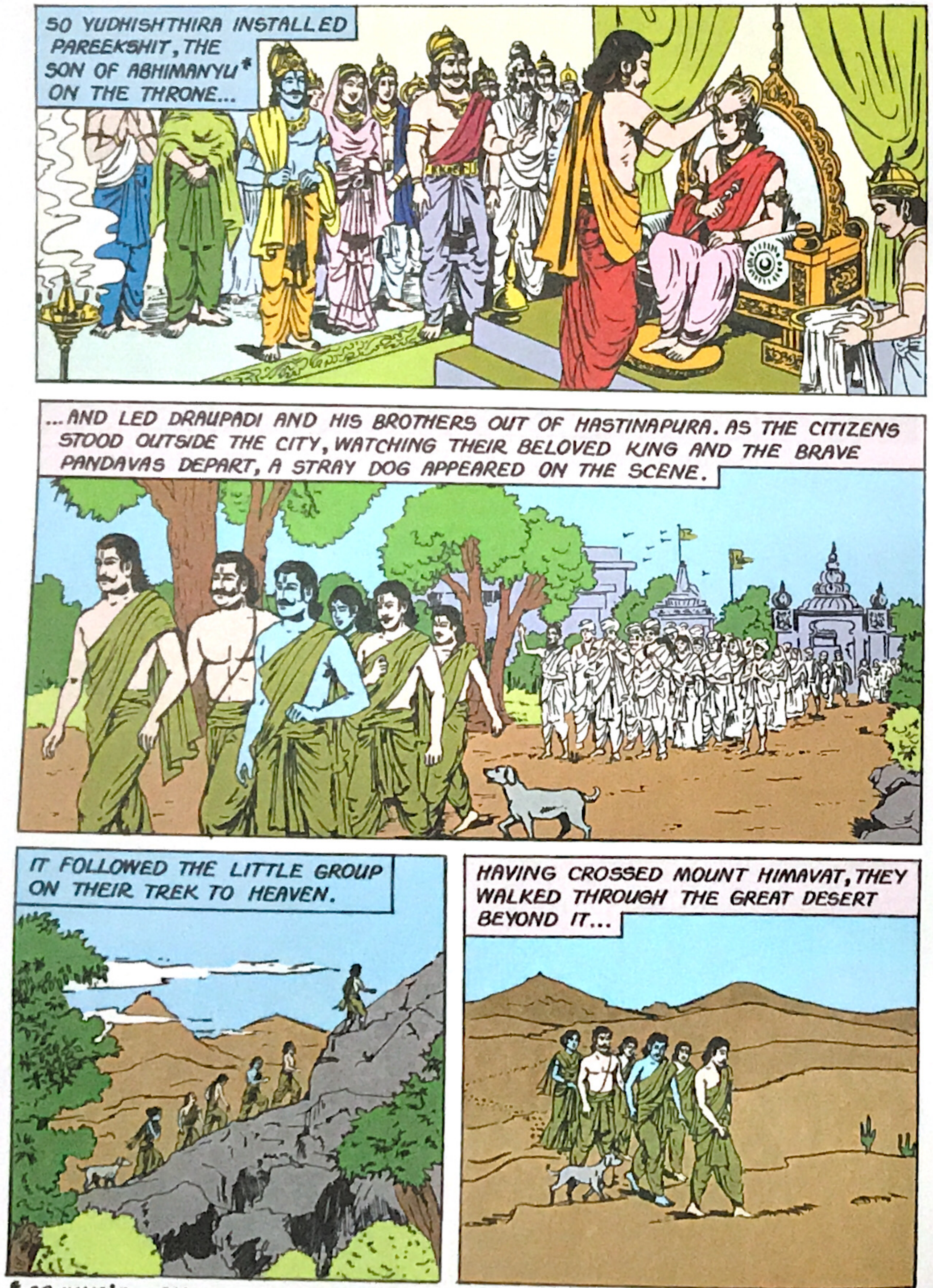
...A VOICE STOPPED HIM.
I AM THE CRANE WHO OWNS THIS LAKE. IF YOU DRINK WITHOUT FIRST ANSWERING MY QUESTIONS YOU, TOO, WILL DIE LIKE YOUR RASH BROTHERS.
YOU, WHO HAVE KILLED THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE OVERCOME EITHER BY THE DEVAS OR THE ASURAS, CANNOT BE AN ORDINARY BIRD. TELL ME WHO YOU REALLY ARE.
THE NEXT MOMENT—
I AM A YAKSHA. IF YOU ANSWER MY QUESTIONS, YOU MAY DRINK AT MY LAKE.
O YAKSHA, ASK YOUR QUESTIONS. I SHALL TRY TO ANSWER THEM.

* SEE ACK NO. 13 — THE PANDAVA PRINCES.

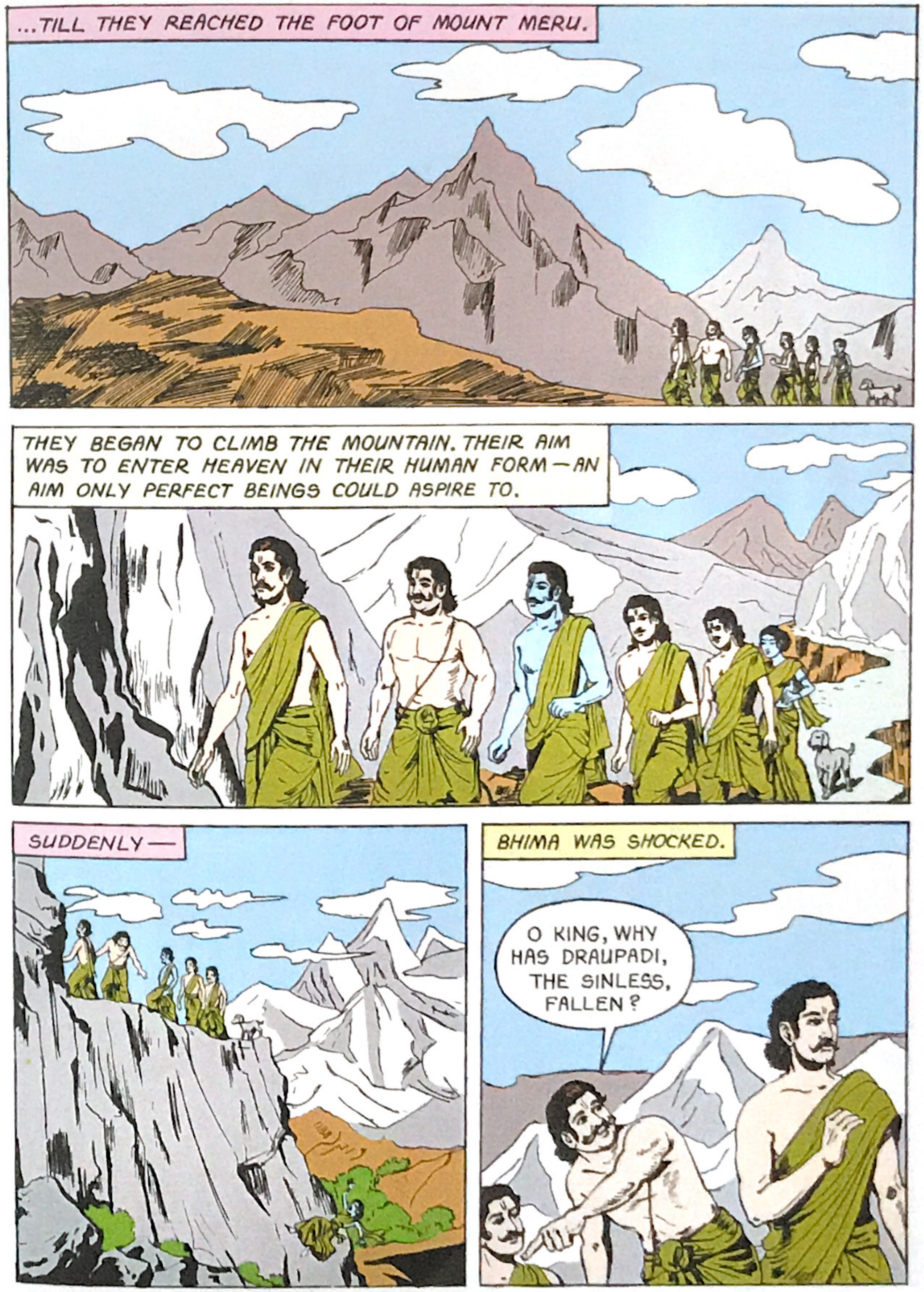
*DEITY **ALSO KNOWN AS DHARMA °SEE A.C.K. NO. 26 — KARNA

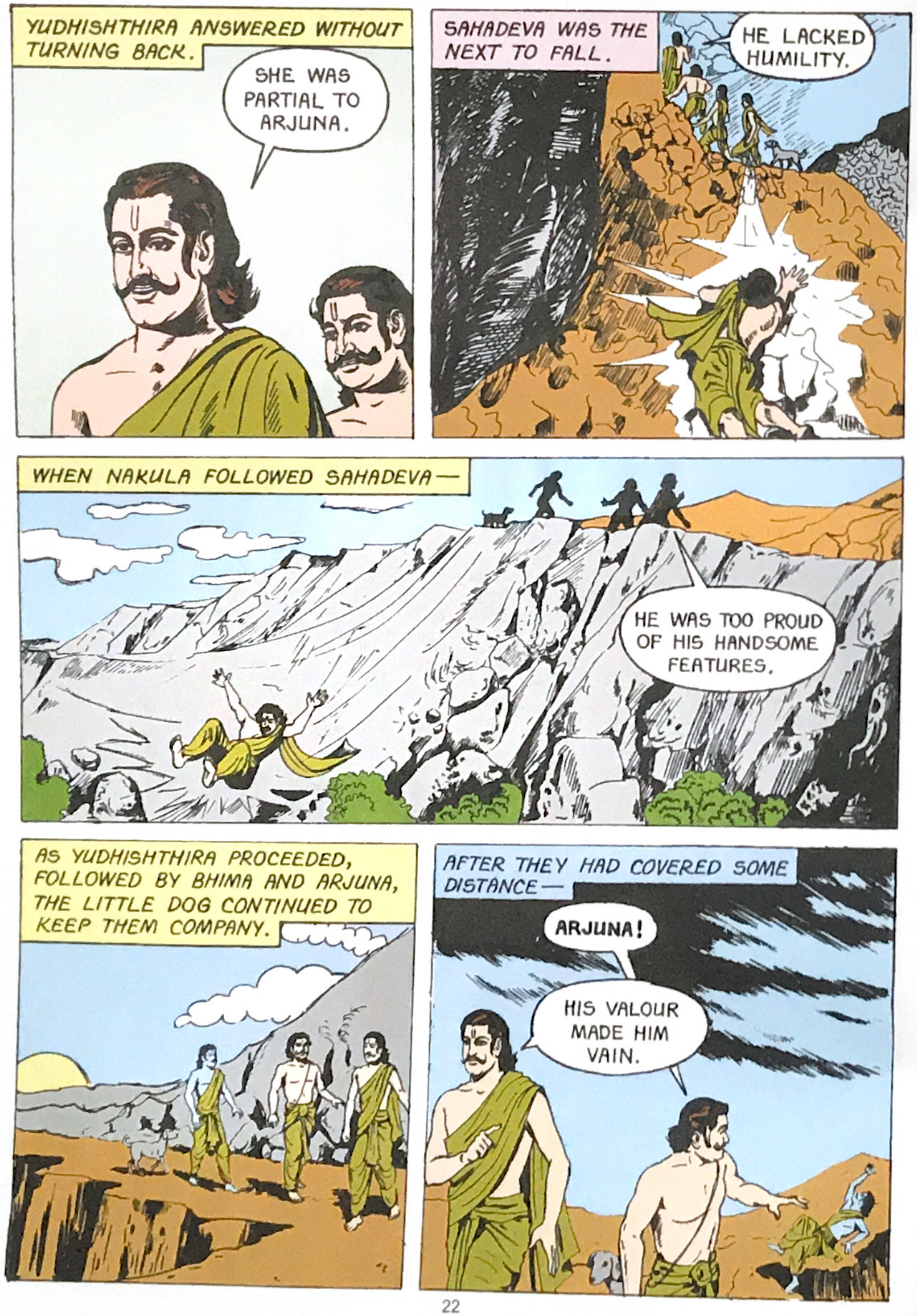

THE LAST COMPANION
WHEN THE THIRTEEN YEARS OF EXILE WERE OVER, YUDHISHTHIRA TRIED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WITH THE KAURAVAS. BUT DURYODHANA REPLIED WITH A CRY FOR WAR. MANY WERE THE BRAVE WARRIORS THAT WERE SLAIN ON EITHER SIDE, BEFORE THE PANDAVAS FINALLY WON THE WAR.
IN SPITE OF THE VICTORY, YUDHISHTHIRA WAS SAD.
THE KINGDOM IS OURS, BUT AT WHAT COST! ALMOST ALL OUR DEAR KINSMEN ARE SLAIN. I SHALL RENOUNCE THE WORLD AND BECOME AN ASCETIC.
THE COURT ELDERS, HOWEVER, PERSUADED YUDHISHTHIRA THAT HE HAD ONLY FULFILLED HIS DUTY. SO HE FINALLY AGREED TO ASCEND THE THRONE. NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE MADE A PERFECT KING.
OUR KING IS JUST, GENEROUS AND COMPASSIONATE.
MAY GOD BLESS HIM!


SEVERAL YEARS WENT BY. THEN ONE DAY, SAGE NARADA CALLED ON YUDHISHTHIRA —
HOLY ONE, IN THE COURSE OF YOUR WANDERINGS IN THE FOREST, DID YOU COME ACROSS MY MOTHER, KUNTI, AND MY UNCLE AND HIS WIFE?
I DID. O KING, I HAVE BAD NEWS FOR YOU. THEY DIED IN A FOREST FIRE.
MOTHER!
YUDHISHTHIRA HAD HARDLY RECOVERED FROM HIS GRIEF WHEN A MESSENGER ARRIVED FROM DWARAKA.
MY LORD, THE YADAVAS ARE ALL DEAD! THEY KILLED ONE ANOTHER IN A DRUNKEN BRAWL! AND LORD KRISHNA, TOO, HAS LEFT THIS WORLD.
KRISHNA GONE!
NO!
I FEEL THE TIME HAS COME FOR US TO LEAVE THIS EARTH AND SEEK HEAVEN.
WE FEEL THE SAME.

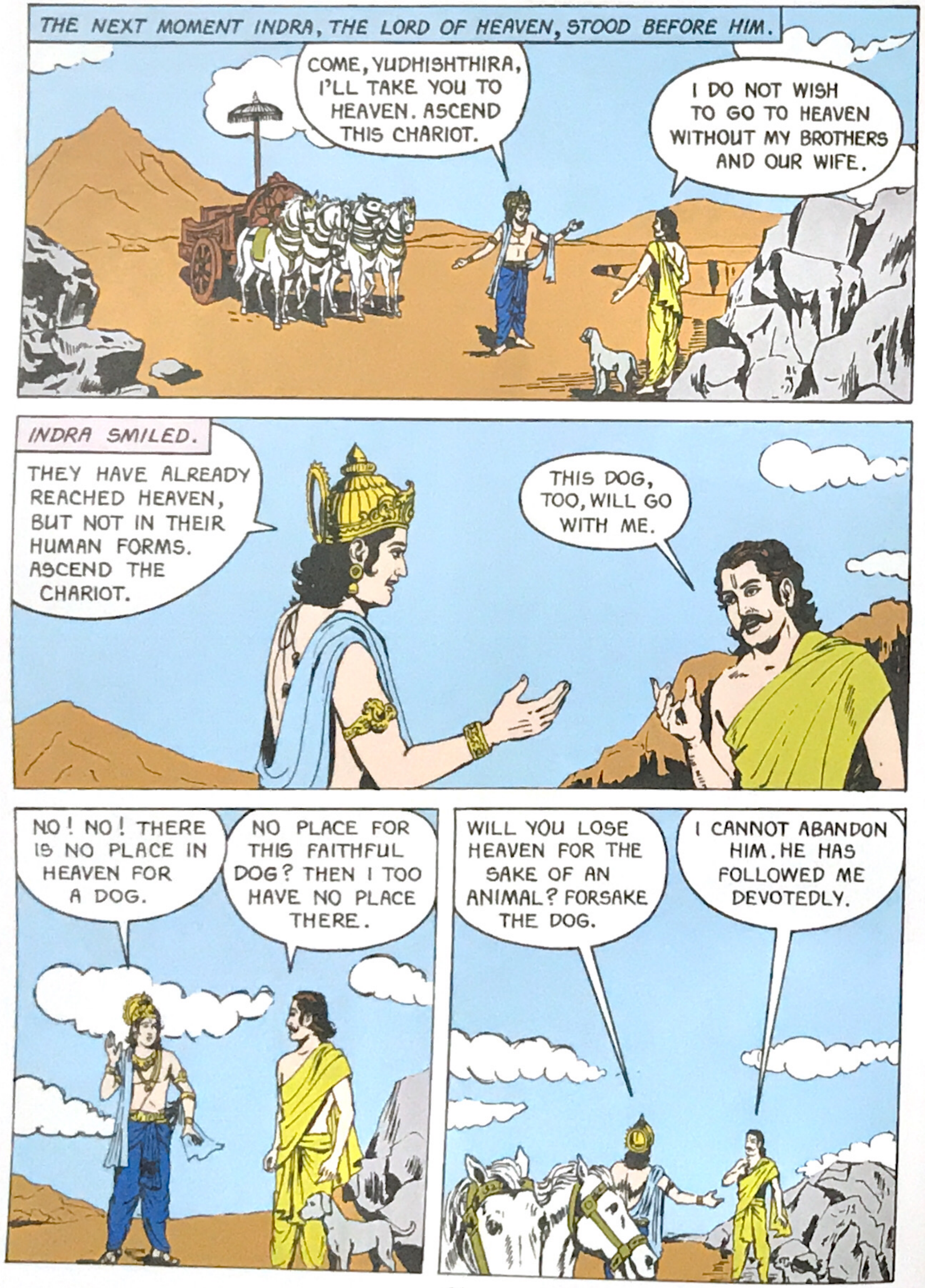

SO YUDHISHTHIRA INSTALLED PAREEKSHIT, THE SON OF ABHIMANYU* ON THE THRONE...
...AND LED DRAUPADI AND HIS BROTHERS OUT OF HASTINAPURA. AS THE CITIZENS STOOD OUTSIDE THE CITY, WATCHING THEIR BELOVED KING AND THE BRAVE PANDAVAS DEPART, A STRAY DOG APPEARED ON THE SCENE.
IT FOLLOWED THE LITTLE GROUP ON THEIR TREK TO HEAVEN.
HAVING CROSSED MOUNT HIMAVAT, THEY WALKED THROUGH THE GREAT DESERT BEYOND IT...

* ARJUNA'S SON

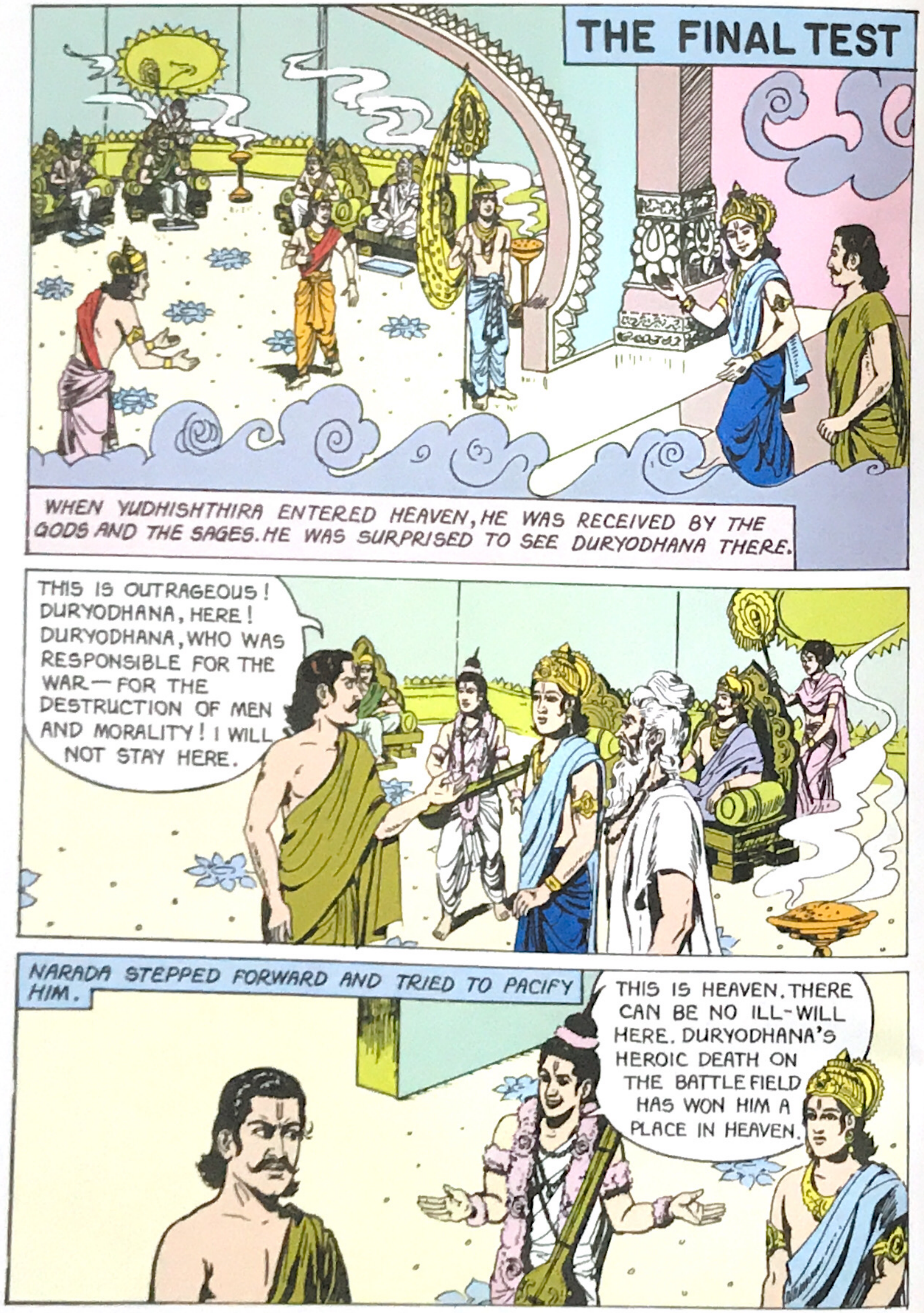

...TILL THEY REACHED THE FOOT OF MOUNT MERU.
THEY BEGAN TO CLIMB THE MOUNTAIN. THEIR AIM WAS TO ENTER HEAVEN IN THEIR HUMAN FORM—AN AIM ONLY PERFECT BEINGS COULD ASPIRE TO.
SUDDENLY—
BHIMA WAS SHOCKED.
O KING, WHY HAS DRAUPADI, THE SINLESS, FALLEN?

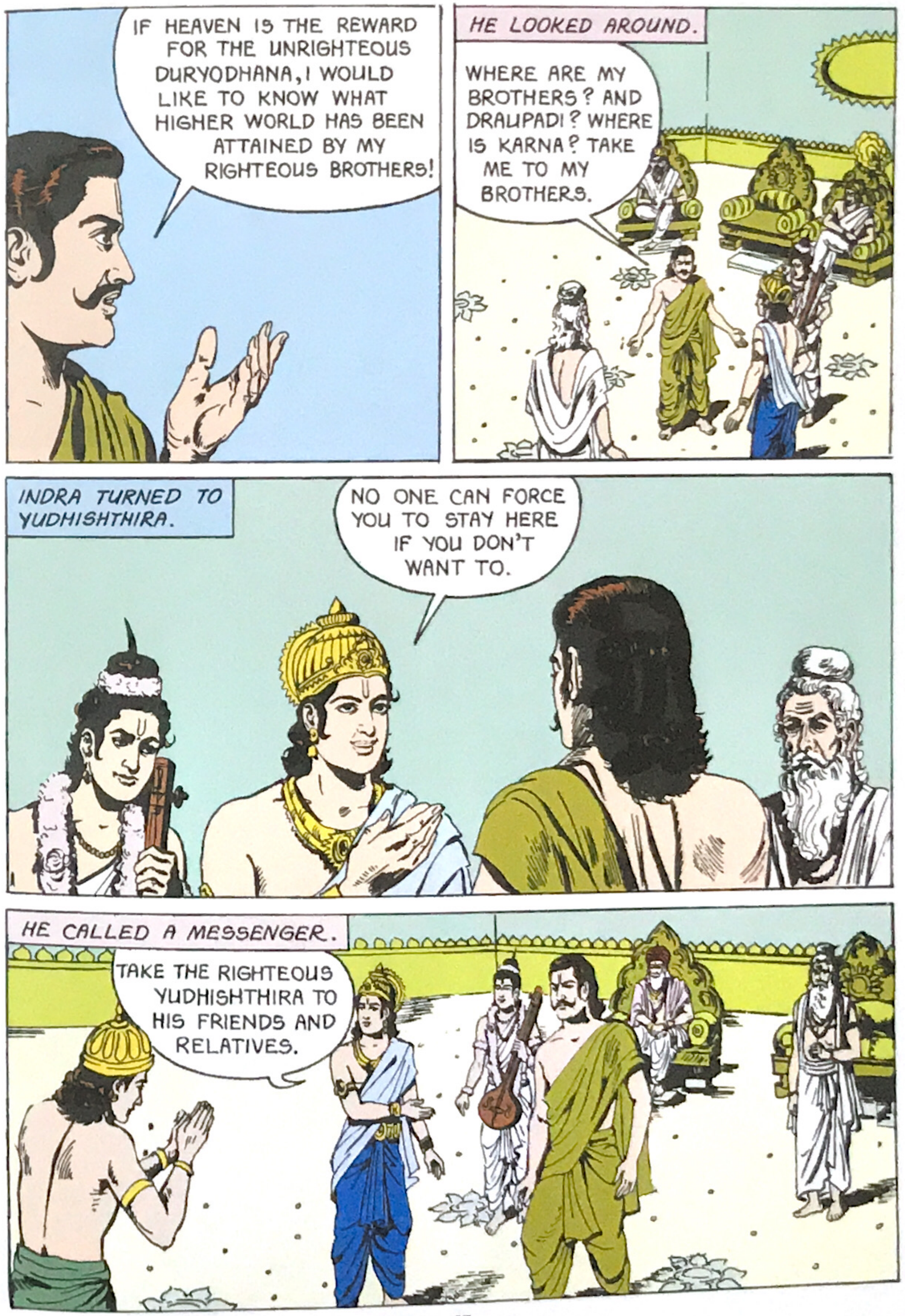

YUDHISHTHIRA ANSWERED WITHOUT TURNING BACK.
SHE WAS PARTIAL TO ARJUNA.
SAHADEVA WAS THE NEXT TO FALL.
HE LACKED HUMILITY.
WHEN NAKULA FOLLOWED SAHADEVA —
HE WAS TOO PROUD OF HIS HANDSOME FEATURES.
AS YUDHISHTHIRA PROCEEDED, FOLLOWED BY BHIMA AND ARJUNA, THE LITTLE DOG CONTINUED TO KEEP THEM COMPANY.
AFTER THEY HAD COVERED SOME DISTANCE —
ARJUNA!
HIS VALOUR MADE HIM VAIN.

SUDDENLY BHIMA CRIED OUT...
WAIT! I, YOUR DARLING, AM FALLING. WHERE DID I FAIL?
YOU WERE GREEDY. YOU ATE IMMODERATELY.
AS YUDHISHTHIRA TREKKED ON ALONE EXCEPT, OF COURSE, FOR THE LITTLE DOG, HE SAW A CHARIOT IN THE SKY.


THE NEXT MOMENT INDRA, THE LORD OF HEAVEN, STOOD BEFORE HIM.
COME, YUDHISHTHIRA, I'LL TAKE YOU TO HEAVEN. ASCEND THIS CHARIOT.
I DO NOT WISH TO GO TO HEAVEN WITHOUT MY BROTHERS AND OUR WIFE.
INDRA SMILED.
THEY HAVE ALREADY REACHED HEAVEN, BUT NOT IN THEIR HUMAN FORMS. ASCEND THE CHARIOT.
THIS DOG, TOO, WILL GO WITH ME.
NO! NO! THERE IS NO PLACE IN HEAVEN FOR A DOG.
NO PLACE FOR THIS FAITHFUL DOG? THEN I TOO HAVE NO PLACE THERE.
WILL YOU LOSE HEAVEN FOR THE SAKE OF AN ANIMAL? FORSAKE THE DOG.
I CANNOT ABANDON HIM. HE HAS FOLLOWED ME DEVOTEDLY.

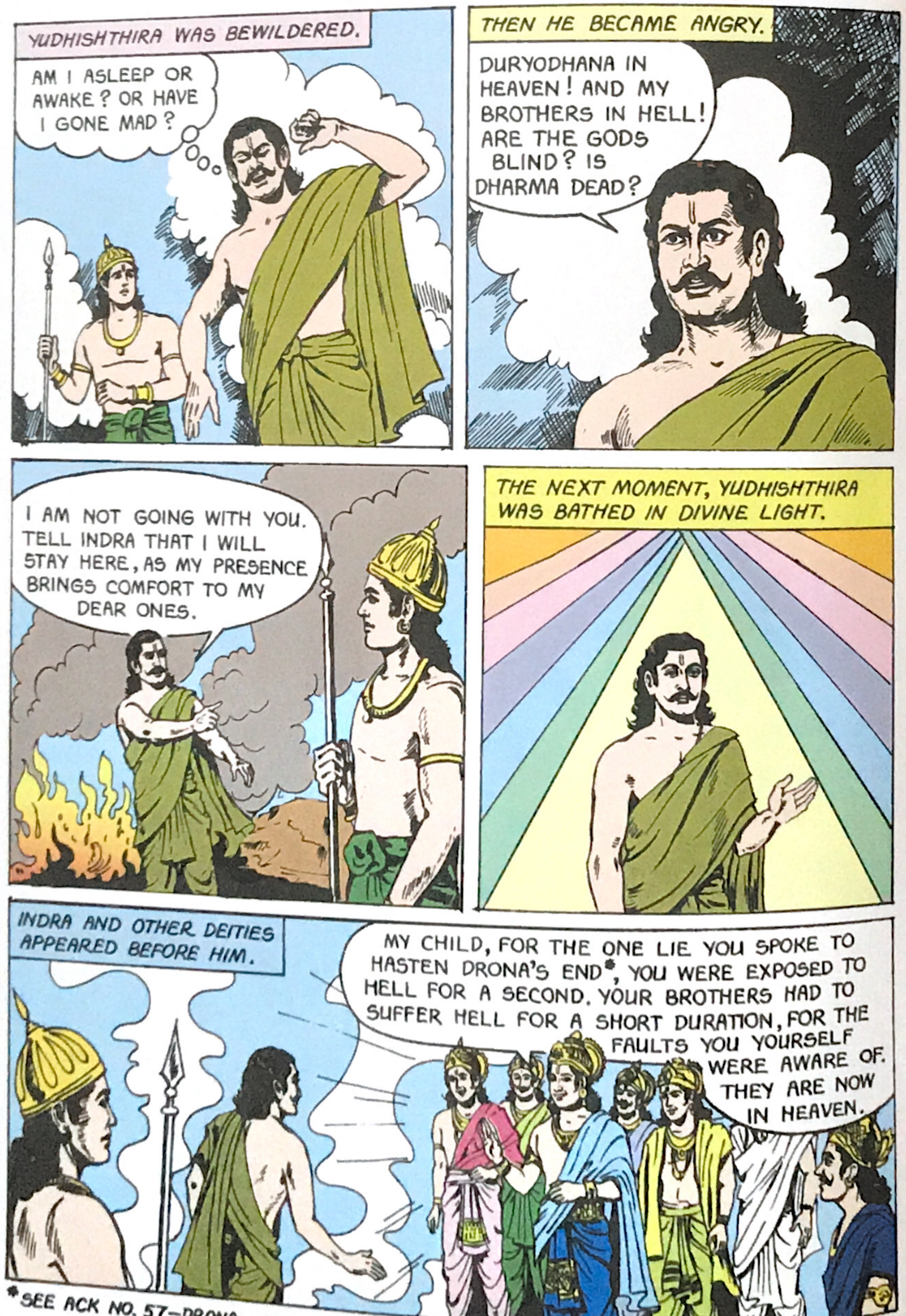
BUT YOU DID ABANDON YOUR BROTHERS AND DRAUPADI.
THEY WERE DEAD.
THIS LITTLE DOG IS ALIVE. HE HAS KEPT ME COMPANY. HE DEPENDS ON ME. I WON'T ABANDON HIM.
SUDDENLY—
IT WAS I, YAMA, WHO FOLLOWED YOU IN THE FORM OF A DOG. O SON, YOU HAVE COMPASSION FOR ALL CREATURES. THAT IS WHY YOU AND YOU ALONE MAY ENTER HEAVEN IN YOUR HUMAN FORM.
THEN YUDHISHTHIRA WENT WITH INDRA...
...AND YAMA LEFT FOR HIS OWN ABODE.


THE FINAL TEST
WHEN YUDHISHTHIRA ENTERED HEAVEN, HE WAS RECEIVED BY THE GODS AND THE SAGES. HE WAS SURPRISED TO SEE DURYODHANA THERE.
THIS IS OUTRAGEOUS! DURYODHANA, HERE! DURYODHANA, WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WAR — FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF MEN AND MORALITY! I WILL NOT STAY HERE.
NARADA STEPPED FORWARD AND TRIED TO PACIFY HIM.
THIS IS HEAVEN. THERE CAN BE NO ILL-WILL HERE. DURYODHANA'S HEROIC DEATH ON THE BATTLE FIELD HAS WON HIM A PLACE IN HEAVEN.


IF HEAVEN IS THE REWARD FOR THE UNRIGHTEOUS DURYODHANA, I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT HIGHER WORLD HAS BEEN ATTAINED BY MY RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS!
HE LOOKED AROUND.
WHERE ARE MY BROTHERS? AND DRAUPADI? WHERE IS KARNA? TAKE ME TO MY BROTHERS.
INDRA TURNED TO YUDHISHTHIRA.
NO ONE CAN FORCE YOU TO STAY HERE IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.
HE CALLED A MESSENGER.
TAKE THE RIGHTEOUS YUDHISHTHIRA TO HIS FRIENDS AND RELATIVES.

YUDHISHTHIRA FOLLOWED THE CELESTIAL MESSENGER. AS THEY WALKED ON, THE GENTLE GLOW OF HEAVEN GRADUALLY FADED...
...AND THEY WERE ENVELOPED IN BLINDING DARKNESS.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
TO YOUR BROTHERS.
WITH EACH STEP THEY TOOK, THE MORE REVOLTING BECAME THE SCENES THAT MET THEIR EYES.
AS THEY WENT ON, A FOUL STENCH ALMOST SUFFOCATED YUDHISHTHIRA.
WHERE ARE WE? WHERE ARE MY BROTHERS? WHEN WILL WE LEAVE BEHIND THIS UNPLEASANT PATH AND MEET THEM?

THE CELESTIAL MESSENGER STOPPED.
I WAS TOLD TO LEAD YOU THIS FAR AND STOP.
IF YOU HAVE HAD ENOUGH, YOU MAY RETURN WITH ME.
DISGUSTED BY THE FOUL SMELL, YUDHISHTHIRA BEGAN TO RETRACE HIS STEPS. SUDDENLY—
WAIT! DON'T LEAVE US!
YOUR PURE PRESENCE BRINGS US COMFORT.
AS LONG AS YOU ARE HERE, WE DO NOT FEEL THE TORTURES INFLICTED UPON US.
PLEASE DO NOT GO BACK.
WHO ARE YOU?
I'M BHIMA.
I'M NAKULA.
I'M KARNA.
I'M ARJUNA.
I'M SAHADEVA.
I'M DRAUPADI.



*SEE ACK NO. 57—DRONA